

Testimony of Tom Swan Executive Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG)

Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Against HB 5501 AN ACT CONCERNING EXECUTIVE SESSIONS OF PUBLIC AGENCIES

In favor for the most part of HB 5511 AN ACT CONCERNING DISCLOSURE OF
COORDINATED AND INDEPENDENT SPENDING IN CAMPAIGN FINANCE.

On H.B. No. 5514 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES AND
AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION.

In favor of HR 6 RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE REUNIFICATION OF IRELAND (personal
not organizational)

In favor of SB 342 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTRONIC FILING OF CAMPAIGN REPORTS

In favor of SB 361 AN ACT REVISING THE STATE CODES OF ETHICS

March 7, 2016.

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila and other members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee my name is Tom Swan and I am the Executive Director of the CT. Citizen Action Group (CCAG). I want to thank you for holding the hearing today and for giving us the opportunity to address numerous bills on today's agenda.

The first bill that I am testifying against is HB 5501 AN ACT CONCERNING EXECUTIVE SESSIONS OF PUBLIC AGENCIES. We strongly believe in the public's right to know and believe that this proposed exemption is overly broad and even if well intentioned will be subject to abuse.

The second bill is HB 5511 AN ACT CONCERNING DISCLOSURE OF COORDINATED AND INDEPENDENT SPENDING IN CAMPAIGN FINANCE. We support this bill for the most part, but have serious concerns with aspects the bill. Connecticut, due in large part to the work of this Committee over the years, has arguably the best campaign finance system in the country. An activist Supreme Court has weakened some of our laws and opened up new avenues for moneyed interests to exert undue influence over our elections. We support the proposed improvements this bill offers in the areas of disclosure and independent expenditures.

We do have some concerns with the bill, especially Section 9. This appears to us to make a large loophole for political parties. We question whether it is an attempt to make legal under state law candidates for state offices to use federal party accounts in order to circumvent state restrictions. This is currently being litigated and we would not support this loophole. If this is not the case, the language needs to be cleaned up to adequately reflect its intentions.

I also want to speak on HB 5514 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES (DMV) AND AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION (AVR). CCAG strongly supports automatic voter registration and applaud you for raising this concept. Having said that, we have some serious areas of concern that we think need to be changed to move this concept forward:

- We are worried about basing this program on the DMV. This is not because of the recent problems with the DMV, but because of the built in discriminatory nature of relying initially only on this list for enrollment. The Brennan Center found in 2006 that twenty-five percent of African-Americans nationwide did not have any form of government issued ID (which driver's licenses are one of the major forms) versus 8% for whites in arguing against the spread of voter suppression ID laws. We fear focusing initially on just DMV may unintentionally benefit already privileged white suburban voters, while not making it any easier for poorer, urban, and older residents who do not drive to participate. We need to make sure that AVR makes it easier for everyone to participate.
- The legislation does allow for the Secretary of the State to work with other agencies to involve them in the program, but we do not think that the legislation should empower any one official to decide who can or can't be automatically registered. Instead we would suggest an affirmative registration for any citizen who interacts with the state unless that interaction is covered by privacy rules.

Clearly this bill needs work to ensure that all of Connecticut residents are included in a fair way.

As a private citizen I want to thank you for raising HR 6 RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE REUNIFICATION OF IRELAND. Here in the year of the 100th anniversary of the Easter Uprising and the continued success of the Good Friday Agreement in advancing a peaceful resolution of the struggles, it is a fitting time for us to go on the record in support of the reunification of Ireland.

CCAG supports SB 342 AN ACT CONCERNING ELECTRONIC FILING OF CAMPAIGN REPORTS. We believe that this proposal is overdue and that there is a process to exempt campaigns if needed. We think that in future sessions this should be expanded to cover municipal campaigns over a certain threshold, but that can wait to a future session.

Finally, CCAG supports SB 361 AN ACT REVISING THE STATE CODES OF ETHICS to the extent it brings the State Innovation Model Initiative Steering Committee into compliance with the state ethics code.

Thank you and have a great day.